

Letter from Taizé

Bimonthly 3.50 FF

2

April - May 1993

OVER 100,000 YOUNG PEOPLE
IN VIENNA

The Hour of Reconciliations

PROCESSED

APR / 1993

GTIL LIBRARY



hand to find the places where they would be staying, and an obvious good humour. The streets of the centre were inundated by girls and boys from every country, trying to find their way and yet calm, coming and going without disturbing anyone. All of them shared a contagious smile. Our city, which many claim is too old, is showing a young face at the end of this year."

A GIFT FOR THE CITY

Another journalist emphasized the fact that Vienna was able to see "another type of youth" that did not correspond to the preconceived notions people have: "They were everywhere, but they didn't break anything. On the contrary, they were a gift for the city. First of all because they contradicted all the clichés about young people.

"And also because they managed to accomplish what many Viennese thought impossible: they caused much of the customary mistrust of strangers to vanish; they fostered a sense of hospitality in people who didn't think they were capable of such a thing. Families, parishes, youth associations and communities offered accommodation; thousands of Viennese helped with food and transportation... The city authorities were able to cope with the challenges of the organization. Countless people lent a hand, even if only by helping a young person to find his way" (Die Presse).

It is true that the entire population of the city was affected by the European meeting. The public transport services and the police did a magnificent job in handling the large crowds that

The calling of Christians is so beautiful that it leads them not to run away from responsibilities, but to run toward places where there are divisions, for example the current rift between generations, between the young and the old. In Europe, now that one wall cutting the continent in half has fallen, who could accept letting other walls spring up to divide the continent? How can we manage not to let the hour of reconciliations slip by, an hour that could be crucial in the history of Europe? Will we be among those who gather together all their energies to avert old and new forms of hatred? These forms of hatred destroy creative impulses. In our life, let us not be people who say "nothing to be done"; far from running away, let us find ways of taking on responsibilities that are concrete and simple.

Brother Roger in Vienna

travelled twice a day towards the places of prayer. More than thirty special trains were organized each day. The underground, the trams and the buses functioned at maximum frequency. To avoid accidents, the police controlled access to the platforms. Just in case, on account of the bitter cold that week, the coaches would have trouble starting on the day of departure, the municipal authorities set up emergency teams at the parking lots to warm the fuel!

The people of Vienna demonstrated the gift of improvisation for which they are famous. Two weeks before the meeting, a fire put out of commission the bakery which was to have baked the bread and heated the individual tins for the meals. Two other bakeries agreed to take over at the last moment. And just two days before Christmas, a factory was found that agreed to heat

in December, the city of Vienna viewed the upcoming European meeting with a certain trepidation. Nobody had thought that the number of participants would exceed 100,000. But the local newspapers were reassuring.

One of them wrote, "When they arrived, the young Europeans had nothing particular to distinguish them, except for the map of the city in their

the tins each morning, with the help of fifty young people from the meeting.

"This meeting was a journey of trust for us," writes Bettina, from the cathedral parish. "Like a fire, trust consumed our hesitations, our resistances, and transformed our 'nos' into timid 'yeses'. This trust was indispensable for us. It helped us understand that the meeting was not 'our affair'; it remained in the hands of Christ; he prepared the way. Slowly we realized that he was inviting us to a celebration, as is often mentioned in the Gospel.

"If it did not come from him, how would we have dared to invite so many people? To prepare a feast, each one agrees to give a lot. And in our parish we found much more good will than we had thought. True, a lot was asked of each of us, but the trust shown to us brought out in us abilities and gifts we were not even aware of."

A week before the meeting, a young priest spoke in the same way. In charge of the region north of Vienna, where there are many small towns and villages, he said, "At the beginning of the preparation, some parishes found it hard to agree to welcome more than thirty to fifty persons, then the numbers grew and finally, thanks to this large hospitality, possibilities were revealed which are in us and which we are unaware of."

LIVING WITH PEOPLE FROM OTHER COUNTRIES

Young people from practically every country of Western Europe were more numerous than last year. Those from the East especially came in greater numbers. No country was missing. Noé, a child from the village of Taizé who gave out flowers to members of every nation the last evening, greeted, among others, people from Albania, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania...as well as from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova...and from other continents.



As we remain in the presence of the Risen Christ, each of us would like to ask him, "What do you expect of me?" And we know that, in the Gospel, Christ calls us to give our life, our whole life until the entry into the life of eternity, and to be a reflection of God's compassion. Will we be among those who, to respond to a beautiful Christian calling, go to the point of giving their life in this way? Jesus, the Risen Lord, says to each one of us: I am always at the door of your heart, knocking. When confronted with the call addressed to every Christian, it may happen that we hesitate. Then we need to remember: even with a very little bit of faith, it is possible to be bearers of a Gospel light. For the human being most lacking in knowledge as well as for the one who is most educated, faith is a humble, a quite humble trusting in God.

Brother Roger in Vienna

In the parishes of Vienna and its surroundings, welcoming these 105,000 visitors required much good will. Some people had to wake up at three in the morning to prepare breakfast. In one village, three families welcomed sixty participants by themselves. In another, an old woman said, "My son was killed in France one January 1st during the Second World War. As a sign of reconciliation I would like to welcome six young people from France to my home for the noon meal on New Year's Day." The quality of the welcome made gestures of reconciliation possible.

Some are now discovering the relationship between that experience and their life at home: "In Vienna, I had to learn to live with people from other countries," said a boy from Salzburg. "I have to admit that, at first, I had trouble accepting the behaviour of young people of certain nationalities.

"This experience of my own intolerance, then of an inner change I had to undergo, was important for me. Now at home, I am taking part in activities against the exclusion of foreigners, against hatred. In charge of the welcome in a school in Vienna, I worked alongside a young woman from Croatia, a war-torn region. Seeing how she struggled not to express hatred, I understood better how difficult it can be to reject hatred."

In the groups, imagination was sometimes needed to overcome problems of communication: "In my small group we were only two Austrians among twenty Romanians and Poles. The first day we were unable to communicate. The second day, I brought some children from my parish, and they played a game involving a dance during which they went towards each person. They found other games that enabled us to communicate without words. It was a joy for the children as well as for the young people. The atmosphere was completely changed."

AN IMPRESSIVE SENSE OF HOSPITALITY

Those who stayed in families had unforgettable experiences. A German boy was touched by the welcome of a 74 year-old widow: "We called her our Viennese grandmother. She welcomed three boys for the whole week and in addition she invited three Lithuanians to dinner on New Year's Day. She radiated joy and life. She had a sense of hospitality that impressed us. She came to the morning prayers in the parish, and to the prayer on New Year's Eve. When we left she promised the Lithuanians she would return their visit. When we got back to Germany, we went to visit



two centres for Kurdish Muslim refugees. They welcomed us warmly and told us they wanted contacts with the people of the neighbourhood. We set a date for a meeting with them in our parish."

person gave what he had— some food, a song— to create a festive atmosphere with great simplicity. In one of the schools, the caretaker and his family had prepared things to eat. One of the young people in charge said, "The trust

flowing. Each person sang in their own language, their faces turned toward the icon of Christ on the cross. Then I understood that we were there because of him; he was the one we wanted to meet. I experienced concretely what the



THE CONFIDENCE TO GO FAR

At Krems, a town 60 km from Vienna, preparations for the meeting began just three weeks beforehand. Despite this delay, the railway company was able to organize special trains so that 500 young people could travel there each day. As in many other parts of Vienna, Bosnian refugees have been living there for months. They are often Muslims. At Krems, they were staying in former warehouses.

When they heard that more places were needed for participants in the European meeting, they offered to welcome some themselves: "We can take fifty more, because there are fifty of us here." In other parishes too, young Europeans were part of the welcome of refugees staying in parish halls.

Many young people stayed in schools. With the permission of the mayor's office of Vienna and the surrounding towns, approximately 500 schools were made available. The young people who were in charge of the welcome and organization in these schools had a difficult task. They discovered that it was possible to create something beautiful with very little. With a few icons and candles, some turned gymnasiums into places of prayer. The night of December 31st, after the prayer vigil for peace, each

shown to us in letting us use these schools was enough to go far."

Twice a day, the participants gathered in the eight exhibition halls turned into places of prayer and silence. They were divided according to language; Brother Roger's meditations were translated into nineteen different languages, while the Bible readings and the prayers were spoken in even more languages. "Already at the railway and underground station near the exhibition," said a boy from Vienna, "I was surprised to hear the announcements in several languages. You could not take the wrong tram, since there were signs saying "Taizé".

"From there you were carried forward by a human tide. It was hard for me to find room in the hall where I was supposed to be; it was filled to over-



Second Vatican Council said: "The Church is God's people on pilgrimage across the earth."

HALLS TURNED INTO CATHEDRALS

With simple means, the halls were transformed into places of prayer. It simply took some orange-coloured banners hung from the ceiling, icons, candles, a few branches and flowers, and soft lighting, for these huge anonymous spaces to become cathedrals. The largest one held 35,000 young people, and the times of silence at the heart of the common prayer took on an exceptional density. Each of the eight halls was welcoming. In the evening, the prayer around the cross could go on for a long time. At the end of the afternoon, one of the halls was used as a place of silence for those who wanted to prepare themselves for the evening prayer.

A SMALL GROUP OF CHILDREN FROM BOSNIA

Each day, Brother Roger came to the prayer with a small group of children from Bosnia who had come to Vienna for the meeting. And Noé offered flowers to Cardinal Groer, the arch-

bishop of Vienna, to Pastor Horn of the Lutheran Church of Vienna, and to Archimandrite Vsevolod, a representative of the patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church, who had come from Moscow especially for the occasion. Other church leaders also took part in the prayers. And one evening Mr. Thomas Klestil, President of the Republic of Austria, attended the prayer.

In the afternoon, theme-groups were held in the halls. On two occasions these were Bible introductions, to provide a basic content to the search for the living springs of faith. The third day, the participants met by country or region. This provided the opportunity to speak about ways of committing oneself concretely in one's own local situation after the meeting. The last afternoon, a forum was held during which young people from other continents, or those with a particular experience to share, spoke about their commitments.

Mr. Pal Solt, from Budapest, president of the UN commission on human rights, took part in the entire European meeting. In the afternoons, he went from one meeting to another and practically all the participants were able to hear him. He said in part:

"When you think of all the suffering in the world, you sometimes have the feeling that it is far away and you tend to say 'It's not my business.' But when you ask yourself how to follow up, in your own life, after a gathering like this one, it is essential to say to yourself: 'All these things are my business.' It begins in daily life, with concrete realities. Looking for reconciliation begins every morning when I wake up. How can I begin in my family?..."

Pope John XXIII underwent trials and said simply, "I am like a bird singing in a thorn bush." We too would like so much to communicate a joy in spite of our thorns. What joy? The joy of knowing that Christ loves every human being as his one and only. That is his secret.

Communicating a joy! For example, when there is a child close to us, if every evening we could place our hand on the forehead of that child and say "God is love" or else "the peace of Christ."

Brother Roger in Vienna

PUTTING AN END TO PAST HATREDS

Mr. Pal Solt continued: "A first step in reconciliation begins here: not breaking with the generations that have gone before us, but not following them either when they pass on prejudices, judgments, sometimes hatred, that comes from the history of each country, of

each nation, of each ethnic group, of each religion. Even a family can have behind it a history that passes on burdens.

"This European meeting asks us to obstruct hatred, not to pass on feelings of hatred that come from the past. That is how reconciliation can begin in daily life, at home, in school, at work, at university."

The meeting in Vienna was first and foremost an astonishment. Then, little by little, it made us aware that, if there were so many of us to share the joy of being together, it was so that we could be, upon our return home, creators of hope for all. The questions distributed to each participant, in the form of a consultation, and published in the previous Letter from Taizé, are a way of reflecting on this topic and of finding concrete ways forward.

Among the questions are these: "What does it mean for you to open ways of peacemaking, where mistrust, violence and hatred spring up? Will you seek to gather all your energy in order to avert old and new forms of hatred that destroy creative impulses?"

Thanks to the peace of heart drawn from the sources of the common prayer, thanks to the joy of a meeting and a dialogue with young people from so many different countries, each person can consolidate their intuitions, their preliminary answers, and prepare themselves to turn their own life into a living answer full of hope.



MEDITATING ON THE WORD MAY

JOHANNINE HOURS

ACTS 2,42-47

These short readings, taken from the midday prayer in Taizé, can be read several times during the day. The references indicate longer readings. If you have time to read only one, the one in bold type is suggested.

Johannine hours are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

1 SAT Ac 15.7-12 Mt 28.1-10
Peter said: God, who knows human hearts, showed that he accepts all people by giving the Holy Spirit to all.

2 SUN Jn 10.1-10 Ac 2.14-41
Jesus said: I am the gate. Anyone who enters through me will be safe: they will go in and out, and will find pasture.

3 MON Jn 14.6-11 1 Co 15.1-8
Philip said to Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus said, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."

4 TUE 1 Co 15.20-28 Jn 10.11-18
Christ has been raised from the dead as the first-fruits of all who have fallen asleep. Just as all die in Adam, so in Christ all will be brought to life.

5 WED Jn 10.22-30 1 Co 15.42-44
Jesus said: My sheep listen to my voice. I know them and they follow me.

6 THU Jn 12.20-26 1 Co 15.44-49
Jesus said: In truth, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies it remains only a single grain. But if it dies it yields a big harvest.

7 FRI Jn 13.31-35 1 Co 15.50-53
Jesus said: It is by your love for one another that everyone will recognize you as my disciples.

8 SAT 1 Co 15.54-58 Mk 16.9-18
Stand firm, let nothing shake you, be full of energy for the work of God, knowing that in the Lord nothing of your labour is wasted.

9 SUN Jn 14.1-12 Ac 6.1-7
Jesus said: I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

10 MON 1 P 1.1-5 Jn 14.12-14
In his great mercy, God has given us new birth into a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

11 TUE 1 P 1.6-9 Jn 14.22-31
Though you have not seen Christ Jesus, you love him. Still without seeing him, you believe in him and so are already filled with a joy so glorious it cannot be described.

12 WED Jn 15.1-8 1 P 1.10-12
Jesus said: I am the true vine. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit unless it remains part of the vine, neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

13 THU 1 P 1.13-16 Jn 15.14-17
Put all your hope in the grace brought to you by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

14 FRI Jn 15.9-13 Ac 1.15-17,20-26
Jesus said: There is no greater love than giving one's life for those one loves.

15 SAT 1 P 1.17-21 Jn 20.1-9
Through Christ you now have faith in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory for this very purpose — that your faith and hope should be in God.

16 SUN Jn 14.15-21 Ac 8.5-17
Jesus said to his disciples: In a short time the world will no longer see me, but you will see that I live and you will also live.

17 MON Jn 15.18-27 Col 4.2-6
Jesus told his disciples: When the Spirit of truth comes, who issues from the Father, he will bear witness to me.

18 TUE Jm 5.13-16 Jn 16.5-7
Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed.

19 WED Ep 6.18-20 Jn 16.12-15
Pray in the Spirit at all times. Never tire of praying for all God's people.

20 THU Mt 28.16-20 Ac 1.1-11
ASCENSION
Jesus, risen from the dead, appeared to his disciples and said: Go, make disciples of all nations. And surely I am with you always, to the end of time.

21 FRI Jn 16.20-23 Ep 4.7-13
Jesus said to his disciples: Now you are sad, but I shall see you again and your hearts will be full of joy. And that joy no one shall take from you.

22 SAT Ep 2.1-6 Mk 16.1-8
God is rich in merciful love. Because of the great love he has for us, he has brought us to life with Christ.

23 SUN Jn 17.1-11 Ac 1.12-14
Jesus prayed to his Father for his disciples, saying: I am no longer in the world; they are in the world and I am coming to you, Holy Father. Keep those you have given me true to your name, so that they may be one as we are one.

24 MON 1 P 2.4-6 Jn 16.29-33
Come to Christ, the living stone, rejected by human beings but chosen and precious in God's sight.

25 TUE 1 P 2.9-10 Jn 17.11-19
Peter writes: Once you were not a people at all, and now you are the people of God.

26 WED 1 P 2.19-25 Jn 17.20-26
When Christ suffered, he made no threats but placed his trust in the One who judges justly. He bore our sins in his own body on the cross so that we might die to our sins and live for justice.

27 THU 1 P 3.18-22 Jn 21.15-19
Christ was put to death in the body and raised to life in the Spirit. And in the Spirit he also went to announce the Gospel to those who once had refused to believe.

28 FRI Ac 20.22-25 Jn 21.20-25
Paul said: I do not place any value on my own life, provided that I complete the mission the Lord Jesus gave me — to bear witness to the good news of God's grace.

29 SAT Rv 22.16-17 Jn 7.37-39
Jesus is the bright morning star. Let all who are thirsty come; let whoever wishes take the water of life as a gift.

30 SUN Jn 4.14 Ac 2.1-11 Jn 20.19-23
PENTECOST
Jesus said: Anyone who drinks the water I give will never be thirsty again. The water I give them will become a spring of water within them, welling up to eternal life.

31 MON Zp 3.14-18 Jn 4.1-14
Your God is with you. He will quiet you with his love, he will dance with joy for you.

The account of Pentecost (Acts 2) concludes with a portrait of the young Church. This is because the community of Christians is just as much a miracle of the Holy Spirit as the tongues of fire over the apostles. The awe it evokes in other people (the text says "fear," v. 43) is a reminder that this is not just a human undertaking. It is something never seen before: a network of human relationships penetrated by the Spirit of love.

Four realities give it its structure. "The apostles' teaching" is the basis: they transmit Christ's message in its original simplicity, without allowing complicated doctrines, "heavy burdens," (Matt 23.4) to hold it back. The "communion" or "fellowship" is explained in verses 44-45: living together in depth leads quite naturally to a sharing of possessions, not out of some theoretical refusal of the concept of private ownership, but from a joyful freedom that goes from a meal shared in common to the selling of what one owns so that others do not have to suffer want. From the "breaking of the bread" springs the source of the freedom to have everything in common: "Is not the bread we break communion in the body of Christ? Since there is only one loaf, all of us form a single body, since we all share in the one bread" (1 Cor 10.16-17). And finally, the "prayers," rooted in the liturgy of the entire people of God celebrated in the Temple, inheriting its breadth and the psalms chanted there for centuries. But even their homes, in particular during the meals taken together, become places of prayer, "little churches" (Saint John Chrysostom).

- What fascinates me most about the life of the first Christians?
- Where do we glimpse, in our Christian communities, a particular aspect of the early Church?

MEDITATING ON THE WORD

JUNE

JOHANNINE HOURS

ACTS 8,1-8

These short readings, taken from the midday prayer in Taizé, can be read several times during the day. The references indicate longer readings. If you have time to read only one, the one in bold type is suggested.

1 TUE JI 3.1-5 Mk 10.13-16
The Lord says: I will pour out my Spirit on all humanity.

2 WED Is 44.1-3 Mk 10.17-22
The Lord says: Do not be afraid, my servant whom I have chosen. I shall pour out my Spirit on your offspring.

3 THU Is 59.21 Mk 10.23-27
The Lord says: I have given you my Spirit. My words that I have put in your mouth will not leave you from this time on and forever.

4 FRI Ezk 37.11-14 Mk 10.28-34
The Lord says: You will know that I am the Lord when I open your graves and make you rise up from them.

5 SAT Ws 1.7 Mk 10.35-40
The Spirit of the Lord fills the world: it holds all things together and knows every word said.

6 SUN Jn 3.16-17 Ex 34.4-9
God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world, but so that the world might be saved through him.

7 MON 2 P 1.1-4 Mt 5.1-12
God's promises have been given us so that we may share the very nature of God.

8 TUE Mt 5.13-16 2 P 1.5-11
Jesus said: Let your light shine in people's sight, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

9 WED Mt 5.33-42 2 P 1.16-18
Jesus said: Give to anyone who asks you, and if anyone wants to borrow, do not turn away.

10 THU Ws 16.20-21,26 Lk 9.11-17
The children you love, Lord, will learn that it is not the crops of the earth that provide nourishment, but your word that supports all who believe in you.

11 FRI Mt 10.7-10 Ac 13.1-5
Jesus said to his disciples: As you go, proclaim that the kingdom of Heaven is close at hand. Freely you have received, freely give.

12 SAT 2 P 1.19-21 Mt 6.1-4
You do well to pay attention to the word of the prophets, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

13 SUN Jn 6.51-58 Dt 8.2-16
Jesus said: I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever.

14 MON 2 P 3.3-9 Mt 6.5-6
Peter writes: God is not slow in carrying out his promises, as some people think he is. Rather, he is being patient with you, wanting no one to be lost and for all to be brought to repentance.

15 TUE 2 P 3.13-18 Mt 6.7-15
Make every effort to be found at peace. Understand that the great patience of God is for your salvation.

16 WED 2 Tm 1.1-9 Mt 6.16-21
Paul writes to Timothy: I remind you now to fan into a flame the gift God has placed in you. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of inward strength, of love and of self-control.

17 THU 2 Tm 1.9-14 Mt 6.25-34
Keep as your pattern the sound teaching you have heard, in the faith and the love which are in Christ Jesus. With the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us, look after that precious thing given in trust.

18 FRI Mt 7.1-5 2 Tm 2.1-7
Jesus said: Do not judge, and you will not be judged.

19 SAT 2 Tm 2.8-13 Mt 7.7-11
St. Paul writes: Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead. On his account I have suffered, even to the point of being put in chains like a criminal.

20 SUN Rm 5.12-15 Mt 10.26-33
Paul writes: How great an effect the grace of God has had, coming to so many and so plentifully as a free gift through the one man, Jesus Christ!

21 MON Mt 7.24-29 2 Tm 2.14-21
Jesus said: Whoever listens to my words and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on rock.

22 TUE Mt 8.5-10 2 Tm 2.22-25
A centurion said to Jesus: Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only speak the word and my servant will be healed.

23 WED Mt 8.14-17 2 Tm 3.10-17
Jesus healed all the sick, fulfilling what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: He bore our sicknesses away and carried our diseases.

24 THU Lk 1.57-80 Ac 13.22-26
St JOHN THE BAPTIST Zechariah, father of John the Baptist, prophesied: You, little child, will be called Prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare a way for him.

25 FRI 2 Tm 4.1-8 Mt 8.18-22
St. Paul writes to Timothy: Proclaim the Word, in season and out of season.

26 SAT 2 Tm 4.16-22 Mt 8.23-27
Paul writes: The Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the good news might be proclaimed for all people to hear.

27 SUN Mt 10.39-42 2 K 4.8-16
Jesus said: Anyone who finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.

28 MON Mt 9.1-8 1 K 17.7-16
Jesus said to the scribes, "So that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins..." Then he said to the paralytic, "Stand up, take your bed and go home." And the man got up and went home.

29 TUE Mt 16.13-19 Ac 12.1-11
St PETER AND PAUL Peter said to Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven."

30 WED Mt 9.9-13 1 K 17.17-24
Jesus said: I desire mercy, not sacrifice. Indeed, I have not come to call the just, but sinners.

Johannine hours are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

A critical event, aimed at destroying the Church, takes place in Jerusalem. The signal is given by the killing of Stephen, the first Christian to pay with his life for being faithful to Christ. The persecution that breaks out causes such a violent shock that the Christians scatter (v. 1). But this scattering—a setback if there ever was one for believers whose hallmark is communion—is transformed into the first evangelization outside of Jerusalem (v. 4). That is one of the paradoxes of the early Church: though the Risen Christ had sent his apostles to all nations, they stayed put for months, perhaps even for three or four years. Seeing the Church grow in Jerusalem, they may have thought that the nations would come by themselves to gather there, thus fulfilling the prophecies announcing a pilgrimage of all peoples to the holy city (cf. Isa 2,1-5).

And then suddenly, not a well-thought-out plan, but a disaster consciously accepted, activates the communication of the Gospel. The apostles are not even the first ones to proclaim the Good News outside the city; it is done by believers who came to the faith later, Greek speakers perhaps less rooted in the Hebrew religion and, even more, the Hebrew culture of Jerusalem. The last to be baptized become the first to spread the Gospel. Even in their misfortune they cannot be silent about the heart of their life. They start a missionary dynamism, confirmed later by the apostles (vv. 14-17), that will never again come to an end. The Holy Spirit changed the hardship into a good, into a widening of their fellowship. It is not the last time, in the Acts of the Apostles and in the history of the Church, that a new stage will begin in this way.

- What serious situation in the Church today can stimulate us to share Christ with others?
- Have I had an experience of God that changed a difficult event into something good, into a greater love?

Taizé and Europe

In the capital cities that host the European meetings year after year, just as in the tiny Burgundian village of Taizé to which the young have been coming for over thirty years, a certain idea of Europe is taking shape: a Europe less worried about its demographic ageing than confident in the resources of its youth; more attentive to the symphonic riches of its spiritual heritage than to the quarrels of its divisions; less jealous of its own identity than impatient to encounter other forms of humanity.

On a dividing-line

Europe is a strange continent. Its soil and its memory are harrowed by painful separations that it has been able to turn into creative encounters. Between Athens and Jerusalem, the ancient world and the barbarian nations, Rome and Byzantium, the Mediterranean and the Germanic countries, Europe has been accustomed to boundaries; its Meccas are crossings: Ravenna and Vienna, Cluny and Cordova, Rhine and Danube; its heros are crossers: Irenaeus of Lyons and Peter the Venerable, Erasmus and Goethe...

Today there is one rift that is particularly threatening to our continent: the rift between generations, the loss of interest in the heritage of the past and the loss of a creative impetus toward the future. On this dividing-line, Brother Roger has placed himself as a crosser of borders. To young people, for whom the spiritual memory of Europe is often a closed book, the Taizé Community proposes a liturgy that repatriates in the now of worship the heritages of East and West.

A preferential option for reconciliation

To a younger generation often at loose ends, deprived of meaningful ways to employ its energies or goals on a par with its yearnings, Taizé offers neither activism nor ideologies, but opens a

space of trust and responsibility that liberates the word, solicits action, and enables, from East to West and from North to South, an exchange of memories and plans. At a time when Europe has to rediscover the pluriform unity of its heritages and the courage of its future, the young people make no mistake: as Pope John Paul II put it, they "pass through Taizé as one passes close to a spring of water."

This spring gushes forth a few kilometres from Cluny, and that too has a symbolic value. For Europe was born in the crucible of Christianity; monks and missionaries were among the first to clear its land and to build its patrimony. The Europe that is being built today often tends to ignore, to blacken or to idealize this Christian past where grace and sin, inextricably mingled, challenge our freedoms. When, beginning in 1940, Brother Roger made the reconciliation between Christian confessions the first of his missions, the founder of Taizé set himself from the very start at the spiritual focal-point of the divisions of the European mind, which is also the place where their healing can spring up.

A sense of the universal

In this same spirit, beginning already in the 1970s, discreetly, even secretly, Taizé prepared the encounter of the two Europes separated by the iron curtain. In Budapest, in January 1992, 75,000 young people from these two Europes, from Ireland to Croatia and Ukraine, heard Brother Roger call them to a "preferential option for reconciliation." He put his finger on the decisive challenge that Europe has to take up today, if it is not to come apart in the clash of particular interests: the reconciliation of memories, the exchange of pardons. This is the price to be paid for the unity of Europe.

The price of this unity is also one of a conversion to the other. Just as Europe cannot be built on the forgetting of past divisions, neither can it be born of an over-sensitive withdrawal into one's own identity. Although this has often

been refuted by its acts, Europe has known for a long time that humanity does not end at its borders, and that what is most characteristic of it is also, paradoxically, what calls it out of itself: the sense of the universal and the taste for differences.

A proximity of love

In a world where misery and violence too often discourage generous initiatives, Europe's future will be decided by its ability, not only to share its own resources, but to welcome the human riches that the Southern continents have kept in the shadow of their poverty.

In calling young people from these countries to come to Taizé, in order to share with young Europeans their intuitions and their questions, the Taizé Community symbolically inverts the vicious circle of relationships of aid. By living in small groups in the midst of the miseries of the world—from Bangladesh to disadvantaged neighbourhoods of New York—it expresses symbolically a solidarity of condition and a proximity of love whose impact goes far beyond measurable results. Brother Roger's yearly "Letter" generally comes from one of these capitals of human suffering, Calcutta, Haiti, Madras..., a letter translated this year into forty-six different languages, a kind of speech initiative born of the silence of the poor.

"Europe needs a soul," wrote Robert Schuman. And last November 20, Brother Roger received the Robert Schuman Prize in Strasbourg. A soul cannot be invented or decreed. In Taizé, still indecisive like the faces of the young, fragile and strong like everything that comes from the audacity of the Spirit, the Europe of the soul is making its way.

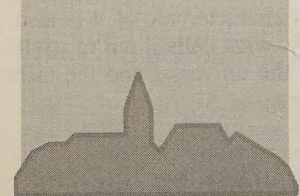
Marguerite Lena, Paris,
Professor of Philosophy

This article appeared in *Le Monde* on December 25, 1992, on the eve of the European meeting in Vienna.

EVERY WEEK THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

Meetings of Young People in Taizé

Taizé



Every week throughout the year, it is possible to come to Taizé to take part in meetings that bring together, from Sunday to the following Sunday, young adults from throughout Europe and from different continents. During such a week, it is essential to be in contact with the wellsprings of the trusting of faith, a trust that will echo a long time, for some their whole life long. It is so important to spend days where each person is accepted as they are, where they can give the best of themselves, and return home with the joy of knowing they are in communion with many others. It is also possible for adults and families to take part in meetings prepared for them.

For those who come from far away, a week in Taizé can be particularly fruitful, as this young man from Vilnius, Lithuania, writes:

"Why did we come here, travelling thousands of kilometres, crossing half of Europe in heat and thirst, spending sleepless nights, and often confronted with the disdainful looks of 'homo sovieticus'?"

"We have waited for so long behind the 'wall', thirsting for living water. Yes, our wall: the mountain left by the ruins of the old system with its ponderous bureaucracy, its tons of applications to obtain a passport or an exit visa, its days and nights of waiting in queues. When you have climbed such a mountain and you look back, it seems almost unbelievable that you have accomplished such an exploit with your limited human resources.

"In our group, the tired faces took on the colour of dust. But those faces were glowing bright with warmth. That was the most important thing: that inner light, radiating a humble confidence in living, in giving oneself for the coming moment. And also the expectation, the ex-

pectation of being accepted as you are, with an inner 'void', with your cares and your hopes...

"An immense expectation. And of course, a number of surprises. Everything is so unexpected: we do not recognize the image of a traditional medieval monastery, a common prayer such as we have never experienced, crowds so completely at ease that each person seems to feel at home, sharing in groups with people so different from one another...it's really an adventure. Only patience and trust enable us to survive the first surprising days.

"It is good to stop, to find a shelter for our tired souls. It is good to curl up at the wounded feet of Christ and...be brought back to life.

"Never before had we experienced such times of common prayer where you discover that you belong to the universal Church. Yes, the Church embraces you, enfolding you in her arms like Mary embraces her child on the icon.

"To live out forgiveness: that is what our little country needs most now. To forgive without being afraid of being considered 'poor' and 'weak' in the eyes of the world. To forgive without waiting for the 'intelligent' to understand, for those who have kept the power in their hands and who control the situation... To forgive because of a humble confidence in his love...that is something we can share with others."

This year, those who spend a week in Taizé can choose among several different possibilities:

The group devoted to the wellsprings of faith will alternate introductions to Bible texts, times of sharing in small groups, listening to witnesses from Europe and other continents. Workshops with specific themes will give an opportunity to reflect on topics such as committing oneself with those who are forgotten, responding to Christ's call, being bearers of trust and reconciliation.

Those who wish to go deeper into the Bible can choose a group where the introductions are focussed on a particular theme, for example the Psalms or St John's Gospel.

Places are presently being set up to provide a larger silent area for those who choose to spend the week in silence.

Those who have already come to Taizé or who have taken part in a European meeting can, if they desire, have a different experience by spending several weeks in Taizé. An itinerary of formation will be proposed to them: deepening their understanding of the Bible, speaking in depth with a brother or with a sister of St Andrew to help them view their own personal journey in

the light of the Gospel, working in a team with young people from different countries to take responsibility for some of the tasks related to the welcome. Depending on their possibilities, they can be welcomed free of charge beginning the second or third week. They should write to Taizé in advance.

A short text is proposed to everyone when they arrive on the hill of Taizé:

"Christ is united to every human being without exception, but of course he expects from you a personal response. You have come to Taizé to go to the living springs of the Gospel through prayer, silence and searching.

"You have come to discover—and to rediscover—a meaning for your life, and also to find the energy to set out anew, to prepare yourself to take on responsibilities in your own situation. At Taizé, you are offered hospitality by a community of brothers committed for their entire existence to follow Christ in a common life and in celibacy, and by a life of great simplicity.

When you return home, will you be a bearer of a Gospel light?"

To announce your coming or for other information, write to: Meetings, Taizé Community, 71250 Taizé, France. Tel (33) 85.50.30.02 (in English, 10am to noon and 4:30pm to 6:30pm) or, if urgent, 85.50.30.30. Fax (33) 85.50.30.16.

Letter from Taizé

Annual subscription

Ordinary subscription: France 30 FF

Other countries 40 FF

Supporting subscription: 75 or 150 FF

Airmail subscription (outside Europe only): 50 FF

means of payment:

- by credit card (Visa, Mastercard, Eurocard, Carte Bleue): send the number of your card and dates of validity to Taizé, and say what sum in French Francs you wish to transfer.

- by international Giro transfer in French Francs addressed to: *Lettre de Taizé*, CCP 20041-01007-0061446M038-71 or CCP LYON 614 46 M.

- by cheque in French Francs to *Lettre de Taizé*, 71250 Taizé Communauté made payable through *Société Générale* (Eurocheques in French Francs accepted).

- In the following countries it is possible to pay the subscription within the country: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, India, Ireland, Italy, Korea, Netherlands, New Zealand, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, UK and USA write to Taizé to ask for the address in your country.

Correspondence: *Letter from Taizé*, 71250 Taizé-Communauté, France

Lettre 169 - DRA Comm. de Taizé - Com. par. 50795 - DL 779 Ateliers et Presses de Taizé